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THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

SECURITY COUNCIL
Fifty-second year

Letter dated 2 January 1997 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to attach herewith the text of a letter from the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel addressed to his counterparts. This letter was sent upon the signing and implementation of the agreements between Israel and the PLO concerning the redeployment of Israeli military forces in Hebron.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 33, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) David PELEG
Ambassador
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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ANNEX

Letter dated 19 January 1997 from the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel to his counterparts

I am writing to you upon the signing and implementation of the agreements between Israel and the Palestinians concerning the redeployment of Israeli military forces in Hebron, within the framework of the Interim Agreement between the sides, to share with you my thoughts on the events of the last months as well as my views regarding the path that lies ahead as we seek to advance the Middle East peace process and reach a permanent settlement.

The agreements reached, after intense and often turbulent negotiations which have been under way since the present Israeli Government entered office, are testament to the commitment of both sides to continuing the peace process through direct negotiations, cooperation, the avoidance of violence and the building of mutual trust.

The Government of Israel is committed to implementing existing agreements between the sides on the basis of reciprocity, and advancing peace while ensuring security. This commitment to peace is derived from the fundamental values which define our people. Peace is the dream which has accompanied us throughout our history. The terrorist outrages which have befallen us over the past year serve as a clear reminder, however, that progress towards peace cannot be achieved without acting to safeguard security. The mutual trust and confidence that is so central to building peace cannot be attained if our citizens cannot feel safe. We are determined to seek peace and security, for our people and for the entire region.

Much effort has been invested to ensure that a new era of cooperation, mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence will be inaugurated in Hebron. As you may be aware, the agreements on Hebron do not only refer to the redeployment of Israeli military forces in the city, but also to agreed security arrangements, joint security measures, the deployment of the Palestinian police and various civilian matters relating to the normal and effective functioning of the city, and the Israeli and Palestinian populations therein. The dangers of failure in these efforts are awesome. Both sides must work closely together and build confidence in each other if we are to be able to implement these agreements effectively and proceed together on the path of peace.

Despite our repeated declarations in support of peace, however, and our genuine and consistent efforts to advance the negotiations, many doubts have been raised as to the commitment of the Government of Israel to the peace process and the implementation of the agreements signed. It is our genuine hope that the agreements on Hebron will finally dispel this aspersion. These agreements attest to our commitment to reconciliation and peace between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples.

The atmosphere created by the unbalanced and one-sided criticism and expressions of doubt concerning the intentions of this Government, while complicating our ability to conduct negotiations effectively, did not deter us from persisting in our efforts to lay solid and appropriate foundations for the continuation of the negotiations. We believe that these foundations have now been established, and we intend to proceed with the permanent status negotiations as agreed between the sides. These negotiations will not be easy. They will require great patience, fortitude and goodwill between the parties as well as from the international community. It is my hope that the international and regional climate in the future will indeed be conducive to negotiations with our Palestinian partners. I am sure that we can rely on your constructive support as we address the fateful matters on our agenda.

The agreements just signed were achieved with the facilitation of the United States of America, which has proved its role as an honest broker acceptable to the parties. The United States provided assistance to the parties throughout, helping them to clarify their differences and work to bridge the gaps towards mutually acceptable solutions.

The leaders of Egypt and Jordan also contributed to the efforts to restore trust and reach agreed solutions. Their constructive engagement at critical junctures is greatly appreciated. The support of Russia, co-sponsor of the Middle East peace process, the European Union and other members of the international community also plays an important role in reinforcing the peace efforts in the region.

As we mark the completion of the Hebron negotiations it is vital that we now push forward on all fronts of the peace process - the permanent status negotiations with the Palestinians, the negotiations with Syria and Lebanon, and the multilateral working groups, to which we attach special significance.

We shall also continue to pursue normal relations between Israel and its neighbours, for it is these which will ensure that the peace we negotiate will be a lasting one. Sobered by the knowledge that difficulties will no doubt be encountered as we address the terribly complex and sensitive issues still on the agenda, it is imperative that we not allow our relations with the countries of the Arab world and the growing regional cooperation, to be used as pawns in the negotiating process. Efforts to do so not only damage important mutual interests but also undermine our peoples' fundamental belief in peace.

Peace must be nurtured, and it is our determination to do so. There is no turning back. The negotiations before us are not a struggle with winners and losers but rather a chance to build peace where we all are the victors. I wish to extend to you our gratitude for your continued support of our efforts.